Volume 14 Chapter 1 Part 1

July 19th, the day before we landed on the island. 12:36 PM.

The Saint Venus, a 12-story luxury liner, was pushing south-southwest upon the sea.

On the relatively unpopular aft deck of the ship, my girlfriend, Karuizawa Kei, signaled me over with a wave of her hand.

After making sure that there was nobody else around, we stood beside one another and stared out at the sea.

“Such an amazing view, huh…?”

The illumination of the sun on the water’s surface made it sparkle like a studded jewel.

Kei fondly looked out at the ocean, a sense of romance encased in her gaze.

“Didn’t you already see it last year?”

“I mean, I saw a bit of it, but like, the view just wasn’t as important as hanging out with my friends onboard the ship and all.”

She confided in me, slightly embarrassed.

Well, this was understandable. For many students, that was their first time on board a luxury liner.

Rather than sit back and take in the scenery, it’s only natural to want to be with friends and explore the ship.

The ship we were on this year, The Saint Venus, was said to be the third-largest Japanese-registered ship on the ocean with a carrying capacity of over 700 passengers.

Starting from the front desk in the 5th-floor entrance lobby, the upper floors came equipped with a movie theater, pool, gym, cafes, restaurants, a public bath with a panoramic view, and even a game corner. In terms of quality, the facilities were as good, if not better than they were last year. It would probably take more than a day or two to fully enjoy them all.

Needless to say, there was also a doctor’s office and sickbay, as well as a system to handle any unforeseen circumstances that may occur.

“So anyway like, is it really okay for us to be on a date together out in the open like this…?”

Kei looked around restlessly, seemingly unable to settle her nerves.

“While I can’t guarantee that nobody will see us, we should be fine for the time being.”

The mess hall had opened up at 11:00 AM today, with the first-years being the first to eat their lunch. They ate early due to a briefing session held for them at noon. The second and third-years, on the other hand, began lunch an hour later. As such, the majority of students should still be feasting on a luxurious banquet right about now.

This period of time before our own briefing session at 1:00 PM was probably one of the few rare moments when the two of us could be alone together.

“There are so many students this year… Maybe that’s why they want to explain things to us before we get on the island?”

“That might be part of it, but that’s most likely not the only reason.”

At a little over an hour, the estimated duration of the briefing session was quite a bit longer than last year. They probably didn’t want to hold the explanation out on the beach out of consideration of the scorching heat. If the school had us listen to a long-winded explanation while exposed to direct sunlight, a fair number of students would inevitably collapse from heatstroke. It was probably a matter of safety instead of efficiency.

“It still kinda doesn’t feel real…”

“Well, it’s not every day that you get the chance to go on a cruise ship like this. It’s understandable that things might feel somewhat surreal.”

I responded both calmly and objectively, but Kei simply sighed in exasperation.

“Not that… I’m talking ‘bout how it doesn’t feel real that I’m goin’ out with you. You’re so smart, and yet you totally miss the mark about this kinda stuff, huh?”

Kei and I had started dating as of spring break this year.

Even though several months had already passed, we still hadn’t gone on any real dates together. A normal high school couple would walk to and from school or hang out together after class every day, but due to the fact that we were hiding our relationship, our dates happened far less frequently than other couples.

Even when the two of us managed to find the time to be alone together, we had no choice but to meet up in secret like this.

It seemed fair to say that opportunities to develop our relationship were truly few and far between.

“How about you, Kiyotaka? Does it feel real to you?”

“Well, I wonder. I’d say it does and it doesn’t.”

“The heck?”

That Kei and I had become boyfriend and girlfriend was an unshakable fact.

However, there still hadn’t been any visible developments in our relationship.

“I just never imagined that the two of us would get to meet up in secret outside like this.”

“Well, I guess.”

Kei let out a sigh as she gazed upon the distant horizon.

“Depending on what we’re told about the special exam in the upcoming briefing session, there might be a few things I’ll need you to do for me.”

“Alright. Only if it’s something I’m capable of though.”

Telling her this had been my primary motive for calling her out here in the first place. That said, since we were free to use our cell phones until the end of the day today, it would’ve been easier to convey the necessary details over the phone instead. Essentially, there was no need for me to go out of my way to risk meeting up like this. Physically meeting up together just because we’re dating was truly a different, interesting experience.

A little while after that, an announcement was broadcast throughout the ship that the first-year briefing session had come to a close.

“Sounds like the first-years are done. We can’t go together, so I’ll head off first.”

Knowing it’d draw suspicion if the two of us were seen walking together, Kei took the initiative and left the deck alone.

Shortly thereafter, it was time for the second-year students to switch places with the first-years and gather at the movie theater.

Upon entering, we were informed that there was no assigned seating, so we were free to sit wherever we wanted.

There were those who took a seat at random and those who sat together with all of their closest friends, but the ones who stood out the most were those who were clustered in their small groups. It made complete sense, though. After all, they were comrades who’d be fighting together as one throughout the next two weeks. As such, it would simply be more efficient for them to listen to the briefing as a group so they could share their thoughts with one another as it went on.

Since I was a solo participant, I weaved my way through the various groups and found a place to sit in a small opening amongst them.

Of course, the seat I chose was not in the front, but near the back where it was less conspicuous.

“…Ugh. Why the hell are you sitting here?”

As one might expect, these seats would be highly sought after by any solo student with a similar mindset to my own.

Consequently, the person sitting in the seat beside mine was none other than Class 2-B’s Ibuki Mio.

“You didn’t sit there on purpose, right?”

“Not at all.”

She and I had ended up in the same place simply because we had both followed the same train of thought.

“I’m goin’ somewhere else, so don’t you dare follow me, got it?”

She stood up and began to take her distance, seemingly unable to stomach the thought of being next to me.

While I had no intention of stopping her, many of the remaining seats had already started to fill up.

Be it to the left or right, there were already large groups of people idly chatting amongst themselves throughout the entire theater.

Ibuki paused, having noticed this as well.

There was nowhere left for a lone student to escape to anymore. As a last resort, she looked to sit down in the seat one away from me, but moments before she could, Class 2-A’s Kitō Hayato plopped himself down, taking away her chance.

Ibuki openly glowered at him, but Kitō paid it no mind and simply folded his arms.

At this point, she had two choices: return to the seat next to me or go sit amongst the masses.

After weighing her options, she reluctantly chose to sit back down in her original seat, forced to listen to the briefing while sandwiched between Kitō and myself.

But… no matter how much she hated sitting here, she seemed to hate the thought of being mixed in with the groups even more.

Otherwise, despite being a girl, she wouldn’t have gone through all the trouble of taking on the special exam alone.

In any case, I decided to put the matter with Ibuki aside and focus on the briefing, turning my attention to what was happening at the front of the theater.

“Now then, everyone, I’ll be explaining the rules for the uninhabited island special exam.”

Just like last year, the one in charge of the explanation was Class 2-A’s homeroom teacher, Mashima-sensei.

He stood in front of the screen and began to speak with microphone in hand.

“Starting tomorrow, your stay on the island will last for the next two weeks. The fundamental idea of the exam is the same as it was last year, in that you’ll be expected to live autonomously during your time on the island. In the event that a student is found to be unable to continue due to an injury or illness, or to have taken part in a serious violation of the rules, they will be unilaterally and forcibly retired from the exam. I’m sure the fact that you were supposed to form small groups of up to three people is still fresh in your mind. However, once the exam is underway and a certain condition is met, the size restriction will be lifted and small groups will be allowed to work together, raising the maximum group size to six. Furthermore, in the event that all members of a given group should retire, the students will be disqualified and their rankings will be finalized accordingly.”

The students of the five lowest-ranked groups in the school would find themselves subject to expulsion. However, the expulsion could be nullified by paying a fixed number of private points. A one-person group would need to pay six million points, while a three-person group would only need to pay two million per person. Essentially, the more people a group had, the less each member would have to pay. That said, only those who could afford to pay their dues would be saved. Since the students with deep pockets were inevitably few in number, this system wasn’t all that relevant to the majority of students.

Additionally, for the bottom three groups, a large number of class points would be deducted from the classes of each group member. So not only would the students at fault be expelled, but they’d leave behind a great burden for their remaining classmates as well.

At this point, the dire necessity of avoiding the bottom five ranks had probably already taken precedence over anything else for every group.

“While I know you’re all excited to spend the next two weeks on the island, there are still a few crucial things you’ll need to know first.”

Indeed. We still hadn’t been told how our ‘rankings’ would be determined so far.

“Each group will be fighting to earn ‘points’ to determine their rank.”

With this, the theater’s massive screen turned on, attracting the attention of the nearly 160 students present.

Uninhabited Island Special Exam – Overview

・For two weeks, groups will compete with each other to earn points in a survival exam.

・In the event that all members of a group retire during the exam, the group in question will be immediately disqualified.

(All points earned prior to disqualification will be invalidated and the group’s ranking will be finalized immediately.)

In other words, no matter how many points a group managed to earn, if everyone in the group ended up retiring, all their efforts would’ve been for naught. While earning points was undoubtedly important, sticking around until the end of the exam took on a much higher priority.

A map of the uninhabited island that we would be landing on tomorrow was shown along with the overview. There were horizontal and vertical lines drawn over the island like a grid, evenly dividing it into cells.

“There are two ways to score points. The first is via the ‘Basic Movement’ rule, whereby you will be directed to go to one of the 100 cells on the map in specified intervals. For example, let’s say that your starting position is D9 where the port is located, and area C8 has been designated as your destination. The first three groups to arrive at area C8 will receive an ‘Early Bird Bonus’, with the first receiving 10 points, the second receiving 5 points, and the third receiving 3 points. Furthermore, everybody who arrives at the area within the fixed interval will receive an individual ‘Arrival Bonus’ of 1 point. Therefore, should a three-person group arrive first, they would receive the 10-point Early Bird Bonus in addition to the 3 points they would get for the Arrival Bonus, for a collective total of 13 points. In the case of a two-person group, they would only receive 2 points for the Arrival Bonus, for a total of 12.”

It was more than possible that some groups might do something reckless in their pursuit of the top spot. However, the competition would be taking place on an uninhabited island, not in the middle of a city. It was safe to assume that the rough island paths would present many obstacles, so there was a good chance that something unexpected might cause injury. No matter how quickly a group may rack up points, they would be immediately disqualified once the entire group retires. Their points would be forfeit and all their efforts would go down the drain.

“The designated area for the Basic Movement rule will change three times a day on the first and last day of the exam, on the remaining twelve days, however, it’ll change four times a day. The targeted time intervals will be from 7:00 AM to 9:00 AM and 9:00 AM to 11:00 AM. Then, after a two-hour break, from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM and 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM.”

We would earn points by reaching designated areas within fixed two-hour periods. Given that the last interval ended at 5:00 PM, the school was probably being considerate of the risks that would come with having us move around after dark.

“Please also keep in mind that, should a group fail to reach a designated area three times in a row, they will lose one point. Additionally, should it happen four times in a row, this penalty will extend to two points and further increase to three points for the fifth. As the number of consecutive misses continues to increase, so will the counter for the penalty. However, should the group break the chain, the counter will reset to 0, and the penalty will restart from 1 point should the group fail to reach the designated areas three times in a row again.”

This meant that, depending on the situation, groups might repeatedly exhaust their stamina and fail to reach the designated area in time, constantly hemorrhaging points in the process.

Conversely, let’s say a group tries to coast through the exam by pitching camp at the starting area and only dedicates their time to earning points from the designated areas that pop up nearby… A strategy like this would be effectively useless. In which case, if no other groups ended up retiring, they would probably sink to the bottom of the standings, subjecting themselves to expulsion and a penalty for their classes.

“When it comes to whether or not a group has missed a designated area, you’ll be safe as long as a single member of your group manages to get there in time. Therefore, it isn’t necessary for every member of a group to reach a given area. Of course, the Arrival Bonus will still only be awarded based on the number of people who do.”

Mashima-sensei’s words caused a bit of a stir amongst the students.

As an example, if only one person from a group of three were to reach a designated area, the group as a whole would get a one-point Arrival Bonus and avoid the penalty. In short, simply having more people would put a group at an overwhelming advantage when it comes to earning points. Even if they cleared areas at the same rate, those who were participating alone or in groups of two would find themselves falling behind whether they liked it or not.

“There is one caveat to this, however. The Early Bird Bonus given to the first three groups will only be given if nobody in the group has retired and all of its members arrive at the area. Furthermore, the arrival time of the last group member will be used to decide the rankings for the bonus.”

This seemed like a reasonable rule. If only one person was needed to secure the Early Bird Bonus, it would allow groups to game the system by only sending their physically capable members to the areas. Alternatively, it would allow groups to split up and scatter their members across the island to cover more ground and wait for new areas to appear. If something like that were to happen, groups with fewer members probably wouldn’t stand a chance. Thanks to this caveat, solo groups had an opportunity to come out on top, albeit a small one.

But, even with this rule in place, there was still no refuting the fact that having more people was overwhelmingly more advantageous.

“Of the 100 areas on the map, some are clearly inaccessible. For instance, B1, C1, F10, and G10 all lie entirely within the ocean, and as such, these areas will never be chosen for the Basic Movement rule.”

As Mashima-sensei spoke, several of the unreachable areas of the on-screen map were shaded red and discarded.

“There are also certain restrictions in place that help decide how designated areas will be chosen. Three out of four times a day, the next designated area will be within two cells laterally or one cell diagonally of the previously designated area.”

With this in place, traveling between the different areas within the time limit didn’t seem like it would be all that difficult.

Since you’d have two hours to reach the next area, a group could reasonably make the journey with plenty of time to spare.

However, the designated area would be changing four times a day, not three.

In other words, there was one interval when the restriction wouldn’t apply.

“There is an exception to this restriction, however. Of the four new area selections that happen per day, one will shift to a completely random, unknown location. As an example, it’s possible for the designated area to randomly shift from D2 to D9. That said, this random designation will never occur twice in a row. The same applies should the random designation happen during the fourth and final interval of a given day, as it then wouldn’t be chosen for the first interval on the day after.”

While it was only once a day, the fact that the designated area’s next location was unknown was a big deal.

Moving from the northernmost part of the island all the way to the deepest part of the south simply wouldn’t be possible within two hours.

No matter how much energy a group might have, they’d be forced to give up on trying to get there in time.

If a group were to try and chase after a distant area, they might exhaust their stamina or get into an accident of some sort that would prevent them from traveling for a while. As such, they might fail to arrive at the next designated area in time, and potentially even miss the next area after that. It then stood to reason that they would not only miss three areas in a row, but possibly even fail to reach any new areas that would be designated later on.

In a situation like that, forget scoring more points. Maintaining those on hand would already be hard enough.

This was a truly frightening possibility that all of us would need to bear in mind.

Would it be better to push forward recklessly and set out for each new designated area, or try to avoid taking risks and move conservatively, fully prepared to miss out on arriving on time every once in a while? Either way, groups would need to be flexible, adapting their plans based on the abilities of their members.

“Also, while the same area will never be designated twice in a row, it’s entirely possible for it to designate D2, then D3, and then D2 again. Furthermore, if a group is already present in an area when it gets designated, they’ll receive the one-point Arrival Bonus for each member present, but won’t be eligible for the Early Bird Bonus. Please make sure to keep that in mind.”

In short, if a group had their sights set on getting the Early Bird Bonus, moving around needlessly could be risky.

In order to get the next Early Bird Bonus, a group would be left with only two choices: wait within the previously designated area, or move out of the range the next area would be restricted to. However, in the latter case, they would still face the risk of ending up in a randomly designated area.

“That should be everything you need to know about the Basic Movement rule. An overview will be shown on the screen.”

The Basic Movement Rule – Overview

・A new designated area will be announced four times a day. (On the first and last day of the exam, there will only be three with no random designation.)

・The target intervals are 7:00 AM to 9:00 AM, 9:00 AM to 11:00 AM, 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM, and 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM.

・Three times a day, the site of the next designated area will be within two cells laterally or one cell diagonally of the previous area.

・Once a day, the next designated area will be randomly selected out of all accessible areas on the map. (Random designation will never occur twice in a row.)

・The first three groups to arrive at a designated area will receive an Early Bird Bonus based on their arrival order, with the first getting 10 points, the second getting 5 points, and the third getting 3 points.

※The time in which all members of a group have arrived in the area will be used to determine the ranking of the bonus.

・Everyone who arrives at the designated area within the time interval will receive an Arrival Bonus of one point.

・In the event that a group is already present in the next designated area when it gets selected, they will receive the one-point Arrival Bonus, but will not be eligible for the Early Bird Bonus.

・Groups will be penalized should they fail to arrive at the designated area three times in a row. Points will continue to be deducted based on the number of consecutive misses. (However, once the group breaks the chain of misses, the penalty counter will be reset to zero.)

The overview displayed on the screen went just as Mashima-sensei had explained.

“Before I get started with explaining the second way to score points, there’s something I’d like for all of you to take a look at.”

At that, Mashima-sensei looked over toward Hoshinomiya-sensei, the homeroom teacher of Class 2-C, who came up on stage and handed him something.

He then raised it up in the air to show us what appeared to be a digital wristwatch.

“Starting tomorrow, all students will be required to wear one of these watches until the end of the exam. You will also be provided with a tablet that pairs with the watch, but I’ll get to that a bit later.”

An enlarged image of the watch and details about its functionalities appeared on the screen.

“Your watch will be an indispensable tool for you, not only for telling the time but also for earning points. This is because the watch is what will be calculating all of the bonuses provided by the Basic Movement rule. Moreover, it also comes equipped with a variety of useful features, such as notifications for when you enter a designated area within the interval. Since the watch can be prone to a slight time lag at times, it’s possible that your points might not be awarded if you arrive at the last moment or leave the area immediately after getting there, so keep that in mind. Make sure to check for the notification to see if the points have been awarded properly or not.”

All in all, nothing would ever be possible without the watch.

“Additionally, the school will continuously monitor the wearer’s body temperature, heart rate, blood pressure, blood oxygen level, sleep cycle, stress levels, and so on. If any of these go beyond a prescribed level, it will sound off a ‘Warning Alert’.”

Mashima-sensei temporarily handed the microphone to Hoshinomiya-sensei and began to put on the watch. It didn’t seem like someone could put it on by themselves, because a staff member had to come out and use a special tool to fasten it onto his wrist.

Before long, Mashima-sensei finished putting on the watch and the different metrics he mentioned earlier, such as the heart rate, blood pressure, and body temperature were shown in real-time on the screen.

From the look of it, the school was capable of monitoring the health and wellbeing of every student all at once.

“I’ll give you all an example. Now this is hypothetical, but let’s say my body temperature rises above 38 degrees Celsius.”

Shortly after he said that, a high-pitched alert began emanating from the watch.

“This is the Warning Alert. Since the sound is only meant to be a warning, it’s automatically configured to stop ringing after five seconds.”

After five seconds, the high-pitched noise stopped.

“However, if any of the metrics continue to stay beyond the prescribed level, the Warning Alert will sound off again ten minutes later.”

As a test, the second Warning Alert went off, the sound a bit louder than the first one.

Once again, the alert stopped after five seconds.

“That was the second Warning Alert. Should the issue persist for yet another five minutes, then─”

The blaring sound of the third alert echoed across the room. It was easily the loudest noise to come from the watch so far.

“Instead of a ‘Warning Alert’, this final alert is known as an ‘Emergency Alert’. Should this happen, you’ll have 24 hours to undergo a medical checkup back at the starting area. If you disregard the emergency or fail to show up in time, you’ll be penalized with retirement or other potential punishments depending on the situation. Unlike the previous two alerts, the Emergency Alert will sound off continuously unless you manually disable it. Should it go off for longer than five minutes, a faculty member and medical personnel will come rushing to your location based on the watch’s GPS.”

The idea here was that help would be on the way in the event that a student was grievously injured, immobilized, or unconscious. Naturally, it was of the utmost importance that the alert didn’t sound off unless absolutely required.

“As you must have seen earlier, special tools are required to fasten and unfasten the watch from your wrist to prevent dishonest practices during the exam. With the way it’s configured, the watch will automatically stop tallying points should it be forcibly removed in any way, shape, or form.”

Essentially, this prevented groups from cheating when one of their members fell sick or something. For instance, it would stop someone from taking off their watch and having someone else score points in their place.

“Additionally, should your watch get physically damaged by a strong impact or malfunction for some reason while still under normal operating conditions, the point-scoring functionality will be disabled. Should this happen, you’ll have to return to the starting area to have your watch swapped out for a new one.”

While you wouldn’t be penalized if your watch happened to break or malfunction, it was still quite painful that you’d have to go without earning points. On top of that, it also sucked that you had to go all the way back to the starting area to get it replaced.

“Alright, now that you all have an understanding of the watch itself, let’s revisit the Basic Movement rule for a moment. During the exam, not every group will be directed to the same designated areas. Each watch comes pre-programmed with one of twelve different ‘Tables’. Tables are better explained with an example, so let’s say that this watch I’m wearing here uses Table A, and the first three designated areas I’m given are D8, D7, and C6. On the other hand, let’s say that Hoshinomiya-sensei has a watch that uses Table B. The first three areas she’d be given would be completely different, such as D10, E9, and F8 or something like that. In other words, from the first day of the exam to the last, every single designated area you’re given has been decided internally since before the exam even started.”

This was something I had been wondering about ever since I first heard the term ‘designated area’.

If the entire exam was just the entire student body heading to the same destination over and over, it would devolve into nothing more than a race to see which group could make it through the same track the fastest.

However, with twelve different tracks, things were extremely different.

While those in Table A would still be competing with the rest of Table A, their next designated area might overlap with those in Table B or C from time to time. As such, several different competitions would always be taking place at the same time.

After three days, the groups would probably be scattered all throughout the uninhabited island.

“Needless to say, every member of a group will be assigned to the same table. In the event that you form a large group during the exam, any new members will be reassigned to the main group’s table, so there shouldn’t be a problem even if the groups originally had two different tables.”

In another light, the existence of twelve distinct tables made it virtually impossible to earn points through the Basic Movement rule by working together with groups assigned to another table.

I looked down at my left arm and envisioned a watch being fastened onto it. If the watch I was given had been tampered with, Tsukishiro could have it break or malfunction to interfere with my ability to score points. That said, he wouldn’t be able to do that very many times.

If it happened once or twice, it could be passed off as a coincidence. But if it continued happening three or four times without any visible reason as to why, it would undoubtedly raise suspicions. I felt like if it happened at all, it would only be once or twice at most. While I’d probably have to give up on competing for the top spot, I should still be able to avoid sinking down to the bottom as long as I managed to stockpile a solid number of points.

So, while I’d definitely have to keep this in mind, it didn’t seem like I needed to be particularly vigilant about it.

Watch Overview

・The school will continuously monitor the health and wellbeing of all students via a specially provided wristwatch.

・If any physical or digital abnormalities are detected in the watch, all further point acquisitions will be disabled and a checkup will be required.

・Provides the user with alerts regarding any health abnormalities. A Warning Alert can be disregarded, but in the event of an Emergency Alert, the user must return to the starting area. (Failure to return to the starting area within 24 hours may result in retirement.)

・The watch comes pre-programmed with one of twelve different Tables. The order in which designated areas are assigned differs between each Table.

・If an Emergency Alert goes off for at least five minutes without being disabled by the user, a medical team will be dispatched to the user’s location. (In the event of a dire emergency such as cardiac arrest or a sharp drop in blood pressure, the team will come immediately.)

Earning points with the Basic Movement rule would be possible for essentially anybody in good health, but physical abilities such as speed and stamina would have a huge influence on who ended up with the valuable Early Bird Bonuses. In that sense, students who weren’t confident in their physical abilities would probably have a slim chance of coming out on top overall.

In other words, the second way to earn points most likely had to do with students using their heads instead.

“Next, I’ll explain the second way to earn points. Simply put, you can earn points by completing ‘Tasks’ set up throughout the island. These Tasks will be held in a variety of different places and can take place at any time between 7:00 AM and 5:00 PM. They’ll be spread out amongst the 100 different cells of the map, but more than one Task can appear within the same area. Let’s start off with some examples.”

An example of a Task appeared on the screen.

It looked like a red dot, showing up somewhere within the C3 area.

“These red dots mark the location of a Task, and they can only be seen on the tablet you’re provided with. As students, you won’t be able to predict when or where one of these identifying red dots will appear, nor can you predict what kind of Task will show up next. You’ll only know for sure once you see one on your tablet.”

Task:『Math Test』- Classification: Academic Ability

Participation Deadline: Groups must register within one hour of the Task’s appearance.

Number of Participants Per Group: One.

Registration Limit: Further entry will be closed once a total of ten groups have registered.

Win Condition: Participants will be ranked based on how many points they can score within a stipulated time period. (The subject matter of the test will differ depending on the school year of the participant, but the overall difficulty level will be scaled to the same standard.)

Rewards: 1st place – 5 points, 2nd place – 3 points, 3rd place – 1 point. Additionally, all award-winners will be given one day’s worth of provisions.

Task:『Shot Put』- Classification: Physical Ability

Participation Deadline: Groups must register within 30 minutes of the Task’s appearance.

Number of Participants Per Group: Three. (Groups with four or more members must select at most three to participate.)

Registration Limit: Further entry will be closed once a total of six groups have registered.

Win Condition: Participants will be ranked based on the aggregate distance thrown by all three group members.

Rewards: 1st place – 10 points, 2nd place – 5 points, 3rd place – 3 points. All participants will receive one free prize of their choice.

Task:『Fishing』- Classification: Other

Participation Deadline: Groups must register within two hours of the Task’s appearance.

Number of Participants Per Group: Two. (Groups with three or more members must select at most two to participate.)

Registration Limit: Further entry will be closed once a total of eight groups have registered.

Win Condition: The participant who catches the largest fish within one hour will win.

Rewards: 1st place – 15 points.

“Tasks will all be split up into three general categories, with 40% being centered around Academic Ability, 30% around Physical Ability, and 30% Other. The Tasks that fall into this Other category are fairly diverse, with some requiring finer skills and others relying simply on luck alone, so do try to keep that in mind going forward. Of course, it’s also possible for the same Task to show up more than once.”

While I had been curious about what the school would come up with for the second method, I never thought they’d go this far with it.

With this, non-physical skills would also play a large part in the outcome of the exam.

The proportions they set were all perfectly balanced as well, with only 30% of all Tasks classified under Physical Ability.

“School faculty or exam managerial staff will always be on standby at the Task location. If you want to participate, they’ll help finalize your registration with your watch and tablet.”

Whether it be Basic Movement or Tasks, the notion of the exam being tougher for groups with fewer people seemed to apply across the board.

“On your tablets, you’ll be able to see where the Task will be held along with all of the information you can see up here on the screen right now. Also, make sure you don’t forget that any information about a given Task will only disappear from your tablets once the Task has concluded.”

Put simply, there was a chance that a Task might still show up on our tablets even though it was already in progress. Or, in other words, it was possible to go through all the effort of traveling to a Task location, only to find that you were too late and there was no longer any room left for you to participate.

“Starting on the fourth day of the exam, some Tasks will begin to provide a different reward: the ability to increase the maximum size of your group. If your group takes first place, you’ll unlock three additional spots. Second place will then unlock two, and third place will unlock one. For a solo group to increase its size to six, they would have to take both first and second place at least one time each. A three-person group, on the other hand, would only need to take first place a single time. Once a large group has reached the 6-man size limit, they won’t be allowed to register for these Tasks anymore.”

While we had heard the term ‘large group’ used countless times by now, we apparently had to earn the right to form them via Tasks. Even though you wouldn’t earn any points or provisions for winning, increasing the number of people in your group was a boon all of its own.

“Should you manage to satisfy the conditions required to increase the maximum size of your group, you just need to initiate a ‘Main Link’ request with your watch when you want to take in another group. After that, the other group just needs to initiate a ‘Pair Link’ request with their own watch and bring the two watches into physical contact with each other to begin with the link approval process. It should take about ten seconds, during which you’ll still be allowed to cancel.”

So this was what Mashima-sensei meant back when he said that any new members would be reassigned to the main group’s table.

“All that being said, Tasks that grant permission to increase the size of your group will be limited in number. Chances are that only about 20 to 30% of all groups will end up earning the right to do so. Using these two methods, you will compete for points, the results of which will be reflected in your overall rankings. Oh, and I forgot to mention this, but when two groups link up, their points will be averaged together.”

While it would be possible to help out struggling students by bringing them into your group, you would be taking on a proportionate amount of risk in doing so. If a one-person group had 30 points and a five-person group had 120 points, their average after joining up together would be 75 points. The average would always be lower as long as the two groups didn’t have the same number of points upon entering into the agreement.

However, since increasing the maximum size of your group would turn into an overwhelming advantage as the exam went forward, a temporarily lower score wouldn’t be that big a deal.

Nevertheless, for students who were on their own, this just made it all the more difficult for them to merge with other groups.

With the points you’d be giving up, there didn’t seem to be any merit in pulling somebody into your group unless they were an incredibly exceptional student.

Task Overview

・Tasks may appear at any time from 7:00 AM to 5:00 PM. (On the first day of the exam, they’ll appear starting at 10:00 AM and on the final day of the exam, they’ll stop appearing at 3:00 PM.)

・Tasks are split up into three general categories, and it’s possible for the same Task to show up more than once. The category distributions are as follows: 40% Academic Ability, 30% Physical Ability, and 30% Other.

・Task appearance time is unpredictable. In order to find out the current status of a given Task, groups must physically travel to the Task location.

・Depending on the Task, successful top-ranking participants will be awarded points, provisions, or even the ability to increase maximum group size.

In any case, from everything I had heard so far, the uninhabited island exam seemed fairly simple.

It essentially just boiled down to racking up points through the Basic Movement rule and Tasks.

“Next, I’d like to welcome our school’s Acting Director, who has a few words he’d like to share with everyone.”

With that, Mashima-sensei surrendered the microphone to Tsukishiro, who had already come up on stage.

He slowly surveyed the second-years in the audience, his usual faint smile stretched across his face.

“I am Tsukishiro, your Acting Director. This uninhabited island exam is proving to be the most unprecedented, largest-scale special exam yet. So, while it’s only natural that you should think to brace yourselves, I ask that you make sure not to lose sight of what it means to be a student.”

As he addressed the crowded theater, his eyes momentarily stopped, locked in my direction for a fraction of a second.

A slight pause that went unnoticed by the rest of the students.

“I have just a few words of caution for you all. As both your guardian and protector, the school strives to ensure your safety and wellbeing to the greatest extent possible. But even so, it simply isn’t possible for us to keep tabs on everything that happens while you’re on the island. There’s a rather… sensitive matter that seems to happen all too often these days due to the differences between boys and girls.”

The several school faculty members listening on the sidelines seemed a little shaken by the fact that Tsukishiro had broached such a topic.

“In the event of sexual misconduct, the school will not hesitate to impose severe penalties, including immediate expulsion. Furthermore, if we judge that it was done with malicious intent, we will also report the matter to the police. Please be sure to remember this.”

While he didn’t state it outright, he was essentially telling us to keep it in our pants.

Expulsion was already a big enough deal on its own, but with police being thrown in on top of that, it should serve as more than enough of a deterrent.

“Oh, and one more thing. As your stay on the island gets longer, tension and bitterness can understandably begin to build up. The shortage of food and water can, at times, lead to altercations between students. When it comes to such disputes─ my personal policy is to look the other way, at least to a certain extent.”

His words brought forth a strong reaction, not from the students in the audience, but the faculty members around him.

Tsukishiro’s policy didn’t seem to line up with the school’s.

Mashima-sensei drew close and whispered something into Tsukishiro’s ear.

If I had to guess, Mashima-sensei was probably telling him not to say something so self-serving.

After listening to everything Mashima had to say, Tsukishiro politely motioned for him to step down.

“Just now, I was told to retract what I said about condoning disputes that arise between students.”

Tsukishiro openly spoke of what Mashima-sensei had just told him.

“However, I won’t be doing that. If I must put forward a reason, it’s because it’s virtually impossible for there to be no friction between students. Trouble is bound to present itself where it must, after all.”

Upon hearing this, Mashima-sensei’s expression turned dark.

“Of course, though I say I condone it, that doesn’t mean I endorse it. I’m simply looking past the occasional dispute. The school will still mercilessly intervene in matters it deems severe enough. With the school’s rules in mind, acts such as looting or using another student’s belongings without express consent will never go unpunished. In some cases, students will face immediate retirement, while in others, expulsion may not be off the table.”

In short, although we were free, he was by no means granting us the freedom to do whatever we wanted.

The Acting Director’s personal warning had probably put the students on-edge all over again.

However, his warning could also be taken as a challenge to me at the same time.

“This is all I have for you. I hope you all conduct yourselves in a manner befitting students of our Advanced Nurturing High School.”

With his brief speech finished, Tsukishiro returned the microphone to Mashima-sensei.

“Thank you very much, Acting Director Tsukishiro. As the final part of today’s briefing, I’d like to take a moment to talk about the food, tools, and other things you’ll need during your time on the island. I’ll start out by explaining the special type of points you’ll need to make purchases while on the island.”

Microphone in hand, Mashima-sensei instructed several staff members to push a huge cart out on stage, filled with all sorts of different goods and provisions.

“Everybody will be given a base of 5000 points. You’re free to use them to buy whatever you’d like from what you see up here. And, students who have a ‘Head Start’ card will receive an additional 2500 points on top of that.”

As he spoke, staff began distributing a thick manual to the audience, starting from the front row.

It seemed to be a catalog detailing the goods available for purchase this time around.

Offering such a large amount of merchandise would call for quite a lot of funding. At a cursory glance, there were products from both major manufacturers and ones I had never heard of before, all seemingly provided to the school under the terms of some sort of sponsorship. As the school was under the direct control of the government, it followed that this exam might double as some form of manufacturer’s test.

“All of the products up for sale are listed in the Uninhabited Island Survival Manual being distributed to you right now. You can discuss amongst your group about what you want to buy, or just decide on your own, the choice is up to you. Purchases can be made from now until 6:00 AM tomorrow, but you can also choose to save some points for later. You’ll be allowed to make additional purchases at a shop located at the port in the starting area. However, making purchases on the island will cost twice as much, so please keep that in mind.”

You could save some points to buy necessities like food or water in the event of an emergency, but double the price was by no means cheap.

“There will be free-to-use toilets and showers back at the starting area and, as of the second day, there will also be a place where we provide potable water. Try to make good use of these resources if you ever happen to be in the area. However, you won’t be allowed to take any water back with you; You’ll be required to drink it all on-site.”

For most students, it would be reassuring to have a secure place to stop by if the need arose.

“Beyond that, we’ll also distribute free amenities, such as toothbrushes, shirts, and underwear. That way, if you ever run out, just go back to the starting area and we’ll provide you with as much as you need.”

Other essentials, such as portable toilets, bug spray, sunscreen, and feminine hygiene products, would apparently also be distributed.

To start out, I chose to take a closer look at the listed merchandise and prices in the manual they gave us. From tents, fishing poles, and walkie-talkies to basic food and water, the selection of items available to us had grown significantly since last year. And, as expected, there was no shortage of recreational products either, with things like stylish swimsuits, beach balls, and pool rings. Some items even offered a daily rental system, providing students with the opportunity to get their hands on something at an affordable cost, albeit temporarily.

Fun and games aside, with a two-week stay on an uninhabited island, securing a reliable source of both food and water took precedence above all.

This held especially true for drinking water, which cost 100 points for 500ml, 150 points for a liter, and 250 points for two liters. At double the price, it would be extremely expensive to buy later on.

There was also an in-bottle water purifier available. Drinking river water straight from the source would be dangerous, so one would normally need to sterilize it by boiling it first. But instead of going through all that hassle, you could use one of these purifiers to filter out over 99.9% of all E. Coli, Echinococcus, and other such bacteria and microbes present in the water, making it completely safe to drink. The price, however, was 4000 points; So high that a solo student couldn’t dream of affording one. For a group of three, a single purifier could filter about 150 liters of water, so just one would be more than enough. Of course, no matter how well it’s filtered, many students would probably still hold reservations about drinking river water, and there was no proof that it was completely risk-free either. Furthermore, if by any chance it were to break or get lost, it would be nothing more than a waste of points.

As for the bags and backpacks needed to carry equipment while on the island, there were options ranging from as small as 20 liters to as large as 80, and from the look of it, the size had no effect on the cost. While the larger ones would be more convenient since they could carry more, the corresponding weight would be that much heavier, so you’d need to choose carefully. Plus, if you went with a bag that didn’t fit your body type, it would add on an extra layer of physical strain.

Meats, fish, and other perishables were also available for purchase, but they came at high prices and would be difficult to preserve for longer periods of time. Even if you used a cooler with some ice in it, you’d probably only be able to extend the shelf life by about a day. As a result, it seemed like canned goods were the way to go.

In that regard, there was a wide selection, ranging from staples like yakitori and luncheon meats to other items like gomoku vegetables, kinpira gobo, corn, and pork miso soup. They were all a fair bit cheaper than the more portable alternatives as well. However, since it would also take some time to eat, portable options would probably be better for those who wanted to cover ground more quickly.

A single person tent cost 1000 points, a two-to-three person tent cost 1500, and the one for six people, the largest option available, cost 2500. Altogether, this meant that the more people you had, the more cost-effective your options would be. That being said, buying a large tent right from the start would entail plenty of risks. It wasn’t set in stone that you’d get to link up with another group, and the weight of having to carry the larger tent around with you wasn’t something to make light of either.

Plus, it was strictly prohibited for boys and girls to sleep in the same tent.

In other words, even if you had a six-person tent, there was no getting around the fact that you’d have to split up the two sexes somehow.

Mashima-sensei spoke up once again, providing further insight as the students perused their manuals.

“When it comes to whether or not a group can share some of their food or provisions with others, the decision is left entirely up to you. The school is fine with you doing whatever you want with what you have while on the island.”

It sounded like we were being given permission to share food with groups in need. While there was no need to help those from other grades, you might as well lend a hand to those from your own when you can. This held especially true for your own classmates, in which case it would definitely be worthwhile to help out if possible. Though, there was no guarantee that we’d be provided with anywhere near enough food to go around sharing it as we pleased.

“Later, you’ll all be given a special tablet along with your watch. Your tablet will be an essential tool for monitoring basic information, so be sure to charge it whenever you’re at the starting area or one of the Task locations. Now, I’ll provide you with an overview of what your tablets can do.”

Tablet Overview

・A small tablet will be issued to every student.

・Provides a digital map of the island, allowing real-time verification of any active designated area and the user’s current location.

・Provides information about nearby Task locations, prospective rewards, and so on.

・Allows confirmation of the current standings of the top and bottom groups. This will become available starting on the fourth day of the exam and last until the end of the twelfth day. (Users will only be shown a point breakdown of the top ten groups, bottom ten groups, and their own group.)

・The GPS searching feature will be unlocked from the sixth day onward, allowing the user to find the physical location of any student on the island. (However, each search will cost the user 1 point.)

・Displays any notification messages from the school in the event that an exam-wide issue has taken place.

・Should the tablet’s battery run out, it can be charged at the starting area or one of many designated charging locations. (Total battery life is estimated at around eight hours of continuous application use.)

While it was nice that you didn’t have to worry about charging the tablet, the battery level would still drop even if you weren’t actively using it. As such, it’d probably just be safer to buy a portable charger. Losing the ability to check your whereabouts due to a dead battery would be fatal. Besides, even though you could charge it at one of the various charging locations, you’d be giving up on any potential opportunities elsewhere while you waited for it to charge.

Next was the part allowing us to confirm the standings of the top and bottom groups. This seemed like an extremely helpful feature for keeping tabs on how the top groups were faring and finding out who was falling behind, but… You’d probably be better off not getting too attached to it.

The fact that it wouldn’t be available for the first three days and the last two days should always be kept in mind.

On top of all that, we were apparently also being given the ability to search for anybody’s exact location from the sixth day onward. Chances were that it would be used primarily as a means to help groups merge up with each other or help locate the occasional lost group member. That said, the cost that came along with it meant that it couldn’t be used any more than necessary.

“In order to let you see how much you can fit in the different backpacks and check out some of the other products, we’ve prepared a hands-on demonstration in the other room. Feel free to come up front and take a look as well. The exhibition will be open until the date changes over at midnight tonight.”

With that, the briefing session seemed to be over, with Mashima-sensei finally turning off the microphone.

The students began to gather up near the front, eager to get a closer look at some of the products displayed on stage.

I sat and watched as this happened, wondering what exactly I should be doing. On one hand, I wanted to go take a look at the products myself, but on the other, I didn’t have the courage to squeeze myself into the crowd.

Ibuki seemed to be going through the same dilemma, as she was idly staring at the front of the theater.

Having somehow noticed that I was checking up on her, she turned to face me with a glare in her eyes.

“What.”

“How do I put it? I was just thinking that our personalities can be troublesome sometimes. It’s difficult for us to mix in with that crowd.”

“Hah? I ain’t like you. I could do it if I wanted.”

She seemed displeased about being lumped in together with me.

With newfound determination, Ibuki stood up and left, pushing her way into the crowd of students. From the next seat over, Kitō didn’t seem to pay this any mind, as he just sat quietly while flipping through the manual.

For Kitō, a solitary combatant just like Ibuki and me, selecting the right provisions would be crucial.

I could remember being impressed by the way he held his own against Sudō on the court during last year’s end-of-term exam. He had played an excellent match, especially so considering his opponent was someone who spent his time training in the basketball club every day. That alone helped highlight the extent of his physical, athletic prowess.

He was not someone to be taken lightly, regardless of whether or not he planned on linking up with another group later on.

“Graaaaaagh!”

A loud wailing grunt could be heard coming from up at the front of the theater. The culprit was none other than Class 2-B’s Ishizaki. He was struggling to stand up straight with one of the largest-sized backpacks strapped to his back.

“What in the world is he doing?”

I overheard one of the students seated nearby as they asked one of their friends about it.

“Seems like he’s trying to carry a whole lot of water in that backpack or somethin’.”

He had apparently come up with some sort of strategy to carry a lot of water at once, but, well, water is heavy. Drinking water was an undoubtedly valuable resource, but it just wasn’t a good idea to try and carry so much with you at once. While we wouldn’t be climbing mountains or anything, weight was still a definite enemy here. It was important to try and travel as light as possible so as not to overload yourself by even a single gram.

In other words, water, an indispensable necessity, was something we’d need to restock constantly. We had no choice but to make use of rainwater, seawater, or whatever other water sources we could find on-site, or earn it as a reward for completing a Task.

Alternatively, with a sufficiently well-organized group, another option could be to designate someone to haul the team’s water. It would be a fairly solid strategy if your group planned on staying in one place for an extended period of time. Ultimately, the things you would need would change depending on how you planned to tackle the exam.

There was simply no clear-cut answer here.

I took a moment to mentally break down the rules of the special exam and reorganize the key points from scratch.

For the next two weeks, we’d be living on an uninhabited island and competing with the rest of the school to earn points and determine our rankings. It was important to note that, no matter how many points a group piled up, they’d be immediately disqualified if every member retires. The ten highest and lowest-ranked groups would be revealed on the fourth day of the exam. And finally, starting on the sixth day, you could spend one point to find out the current location of any student on the island.

It was time to come to a decision and pick out what I’d be bringing along with me.